

# County budget vote delayed

Finance committee  
seeks more time;  
convention recessed

By MATTHEW REID  
Staff Reporter

NEWPORT — Sullivan County is still without a budget for Fiscal Year 2008 despite a lengthy convention taking up most of last Friday morning.

Members of the Sullivan County delegation were joined by county commissioners to discuss the budget process June 29, but were unable to come to a consensus on how to proceed. The meeting was eventually recessed until Friday, July 13, at 9 a.m.

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Brenda Ferland, I-Charlestown, told those in attendance at the convention that the delegation's executive finance committee, of which Ferland is the chairman, has not been able to meet as a group often enough to finalize a budget for the county.

With the upcoming fiscal year only days away (as of the convention), the delegation sought a way to allow the county to pay its bills through the end of July. A "temporary resolution" was eventually passed during the meeting that will allow the county to borrow up to \$2 million, which Ferland said should be enough to cover a month's worth of operating expenses while the EFC attempts to finalize their version of the budget.

Ferland also said she expects the budget to be ready in the next few weeks, presumably before the convention continues on July 13.

Sullivan County Delegation Chairman Peter Franklin, D-Newport, said he found the motion asking for the resolution objectionable, and wanted the county's attorney, Marc Hathaway, to review it before a vote was taken.

Hathaway did just that, urging the convention to pass the motion and give the EFC more time.

"It's critical that this resolution passes today," Hathaway said, stating the time for making such a decision was running out.

Rep. Bev Rodeschin, R-Newport, recommended the convention accept the county commissioners' proposed

FY08 budget rather than waiting on the EFC.

The commissioner's budget, which was included as part of a 130-plus page report made available to everyone prior to the meeting, proposes the county spend \$27,629,657 in the coming year. The figure is a 6.27 percent increase, or more than \$1.5 million over the nearly \$26 million figure from last year's budget.

Franklin refused to allow a motion to accept the budget several times, despite it being made by other delegates.

Many who spoke, including Commissioner Jeff Barrette, said it would be wise for the convention to accept the budget.

Ferland disagreed, saying it would not be fair to adopt the commissioners' budget without letting the EFC have another chance at finalizing a budget of its own.

When a vote on the commissioners' budget was finally taken, it failed 4 to 9.

After Franklin refused a motion by Rodeschin to adjourn the meeting, Rodeschin, Gil de Rubio, Barrette and Ferland left the meeting.

Delegation members, most noticeably Franklin, have expressed concern over the past few months about the way the county's finances have been managed. Discussions have become heated both in regard to the handling of the FY07 budget and the planning of the FY08 budget.

Franklin also requested, several times, to hear a

rundown of the money the county has spent so far this year. Both county bookkeeper Dodi Violette and County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio responded to Franklin, but the delegation chairman was not pleased.

"I want to know exactly where the money has been going," he said. "Exactly."

Rodeschin reminded Franklin more than once to stay on track, saying the convention was being held for the purpose of working on the upcoming fiscal year's budget, rather than for members to seek answers about financial decisions that have already been made.

Attendance at delegation meetings has also drawn the ire of Franklin in recent months, after Gil de Rubio and other high-ranking county officials have been "unable" to attend meetings. Part of Franklin's frustration over the original motion made by Ferland was that the EFC had been unable to find a quorum to meet and work on the budget.

Commissioner Ben Nelson wanted to speak several times during the meeting, having his hand raised in the air for long periods of time, but Franklin refused to acknowledge him.

The delegation continued to discuss matters relating to the budget while Nelson's hand was raised, despite Franklin being openly informed by fellow delegates of Nelson's desire to speak.